

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW  
#302**

**JOHN CARL WEINBERGER  
USS *WHITNEY*, SURVIVOR**

**INTERVIEWED ON  
DECEMBER 8, 1998  
BY DANIEL MARTINEZ**

TRANSCRIBED BY:

CARA KIMURA

JANUARY 13, 2002

**USS *ARIZONA* MEMORIAL  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**Daniel Martinez (DM):** The following oral history interview was conducted by Daniel Martinez, historian for the National Park Service at the USS *Arizona* Memorial. It was taped at the Imperial Palace Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada on December 8, 1998, at approximately four p.m. in the afternoon. The person being interviewed is Mr. John C. Weinberger, who was aboard the USS *Whitney* [AD-4] on December 7, 1941. For the record, John, would you please state your full and complete name?

**John Carl Weinberger (JW):** John Carl Weinberger.

DM: And could you please give me your place and date of birth?

JW: I was born June the 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1923 in Leroy, Wisconsin. That's a little town just a little west of West Bend.

DM: Okay.

JW: And then when I was real young, my folks moved to Mayville—that's a little south—on a farm.

DM: Uh-huh.

JW: Then we moved into the city during the depression.

DM: Okay. Let me ask you, how many kids were in your family?

JW: There was eight of us.

DM: And where were you in that group?

JW: I was number six. No. Number six.

DM: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

JW: I have two brothers and five sisters.

DM: You mean there was five girls in that family?

JW: Yeah.

DM: How did you survive that?

JW: Oh, we had it nice. (Chuckles) But anyway, out of the bunch, there's two, three girls are dead. Three girls passed away.

DM: Uh-huh.

JW: And the rest of them are living.

DM: They're all living?

JW: Yeah.

DM: Would you say that you were a very close-knit family?

JW: Oh yes.

DM: Now, initially the family was on the farm?

JW: Initially on the farm, yes.

DM: And so did you do farm chores when you were growing up?

JW: When I was, started school, yeah.

DM: Yeah?

JW: And then but father lost the farm during the depression so we moved to the city.

DM: Uh-huh.

JW: And then he picked up work wherever he could get it. And then I grew up in Mayville.

DM: Uh-huh.

JW: I went to Mayville schools and then in high school, was like today. The kids, school isn't interesting no more.

DM: Right.

JW: And I was the same way.

DM: Now, the depression was tough on American families during that time.

JW: Rough on everybody.

DM: Your mother, how did she do? Did she raise the family or did she have to work too?

JW: Oh yeah, we had to work too. Yeah. 'Cause kids had to help.

DM: How about your mother? Did she stay...

JW: Oh yeah. She went with us. We worked out in the fields then.

DM: Is that right?

JW: And we worked sugar beets.

DM: That's tough work.

JW: Yeah, that's hard work. And then, but that way my father got a little \_\_\_\_\_.

DM: Uh-huh.

JW: 'Cause we had to eat.

DM: Yeah.

JW: And then rent was fifteen dollars a month, so that's where it went.

DM: Now, you went all the way through elementary school?

JW: Elementary school.

DM: And did you get to go to high school?

JW: Yes. I started high school and in—you know, kids are, even today, they get antsy, they don't like school anymore. I was the same way. I wanted to get out.

DM: And what did you want to do?

JW: I wanted to see the world, see.

DM: So how did you intend to see the world?

JW: Going in the navy.

DM: And so how old were you when you enlisted?

JW: Seventeen.

DM: And what town did you enlist in?

JW: Well, the recruiter came to Hull.

DM: Uh-huh.

JW: And then they sent us down to Chicago and I signed up in Chicago.

DM: Was that the first time you ever went to Chicago?

JW: First time.

DM: Big city.

JW: Yeah, first time I was out of the state.

DM: Really.

JW: Yeah.

DM: Maybe first time you were out of the county.

JW: No, I was out of the county before, because my grandmother and had relatives living in Milwaukee.

DM: Mm-hmm.

JW: That was an all-day trip to go down there.

DM: Now, you're seventeen. Your parents had to sign for you.

JW: Yeah.

DM: And they did.

JW: Sure.

DM: That's a very young age to go into the navy.

JW: But it was what they call a minority cruise. And then at twenty-one, I was supposed to get out.

DM: Okay.

JW: So I was twenty-one but the war was going on yet, so I had to stay in.

DM: You went up to Chicago and enlisted. Did they send you to San Diego, or to...

JW: Oh no.

DM: ...Great Lakes?

JW: Great Lakes.

DM: And you went through your training there, or your boot camp.

JW: Yup.

DM: What was boot camp like?

JW: It's rough. You know, being at home, and then you have that, you have the run of what you want to do.

DM: Uh-huh.

JW: When you're at boot camp, military is different.

DM: It's disciplined.

JW: You've been in the military, haven't you?

DM: Well, pretty close.

JW: Okay. You know what it's like.

DM: No, I don't know what it's totally like, but I got, I went through a part of it and I have the feeling that it was a whole different world.

JW: After the first day, I thought boy, I never should have joined up.

DM: You thought it was a big mistake?

JW: Yeah. I thought it was a mistake. But afterwards, after boot training, we were assigned to our ships and that was a little better.

DM: Now, did you know how to swim before you went in the navy?

JW: Oh yeah. We knew how to swim.

DM: So you passed your swim test?

JW: Oh yeah. No problem with that.

DM: No problem with that. And when you graduated, did they assign you to a ship?

JW: Yeah, we were assigned to a ship.

DM: What ship were you assigned to?

JW: The USS *Dixie*.

DM: The USS *Dixon*?

JW: *Dixie*.

DM: *Dixie*. What kind of ship was she?

JW: That was also a repair ship. [*Note: USS Dixie (AD-14) was a destroyer tender*]

DM: Okay.

JW: That was a brand new ship. It was only about a year old.

DM: Where was she stationed at?

JW: She was stationed at Pearl [*Harbor*].

DM: Okay. So you go to Hawaii now. Now you're really seeing the world.

JW: Yeah, I figured that's...

DM: How did you get to Hawaii?

JW: Well, we were sent down to San Diego, the whole troop train.

DM: Right.

JW: And then we waited in San Diego for a ship, for transportation to go over to Hawaii.

DM: Do you remember the ship that took you over?

JW: Oh yes.

DM: What was the name of that?

JW: USS *Henderson*.

DM: Oh, okay.

JW: It was a Marine transport. [*Note: USS Henderson (AP-1) was a navy transport*]

DM: Okay.

JW: So then we got to Hawaii, got aboard the ship.

DM: What did you think of Hawaii?

JW: It was nice, beautiful.

DM: What was the thing that struck you about Hawaii?

JW: I never seen any beauty like that before.

DM: Right.

JW: And the mountains and so forth, I never seen mountains. Well, I saw mountains when we went to San Diego, but...

DM: You had heard about Hawaii before, right?

JW: Oh yeah.

DM: So you weren't disappointed when you got there?

JW: Oh no. I was not a bit disappointed.

DM: Were you looking for hula girls?

JW: No. I wanted to go to China. That was my ambition, to go to China.

DM: You wanted to be a China sailor?

JW: Yeah. I wanted to be a China sailor. But I couldn't make China sailor.

DM: How long were you on the *Dixie*?

JW: Well, I was on there a few weeks. I got shanghai-ed.  
(Chuckles) You know what shanghai is?

DM: No, explain to me the term shanghai-ed.

JW: Well, I had a division chief. I was in the deck force, see.

DM: Uh-huh.

JW: And some way or another, he didn't care for me. So then there was an opening in the flag, battle flag, of the deckhand on his barge, so he put me on there.

DM: Okay.

JW: So he could get rid of me. Then I got on the barge.

DM: Which admiral was that?

JW: I don't remember his name. Big, tall, red-headed fellow.

DM: Yeah.

JW: And then they transferred the flag off the *Dixie*, out to the *Detroit* [CL-8]. The *Detroit* was a cruiser.

DM: Right.

JW: And then I was stationed with them guys then.

DM: Right.

JW: And from there, they transferred the flag over on the *Whitney*, so all that summer I was working on this admiral's barge.

DM: Right.

JW: And I could see no headway in there. So...

DM: It was pretty spit and polish, wasn't it?

JW: Oh yeah. It was all spit and polish stuff.

DM: Yeah.

JW: So then we were his side boys and all that stuff.

DM: Right.

JW: So then I was talking to our engineer in the boat and I says, "I want to get out of this. How can I do it?"

"Well, why don't you see the admiral."

Okay, so I goes up by the admiral.

DM: He said to see the admiral?

JW: Yeah. Well, I talked to the guy every day.

DM: Right.

JW: So then I went to see him and then I asked, "Could I get a transfer?"

"Well, what do you want to do?"

I said, "I want to get the engine room. I want to be a snipe."  
You know what a snipe is?

DM: Yes, I do. But the people may be listening to this oral history  
may not know what a snipe is.

JW: Well, a snipe is actually a striker for a engineman.

DM: Okay. What does a snipe do?

JW: He's a low man on the totem pole.

DM: Right.

JW: Well, he works his way up the line, see.

DM: What would be a snipe's duties.

JW: Well...

DM: Lighting up the boilers?

JW: Yeah, stuff like that. Lighting up the boilers. And then,  
running the motor launches.

DM: Right.

JW: And that was engineering, the motor launch. That's how we  
got in there.

DM: Right.

JW: And then they called us snipes.

DM: Okay.

JW: So that's the only way you could get ahead, see. So then I was assigned under the *Whitney*, into the fire room first. Then they found out I had boat duty. Well, they needed an experienced fellow with the boats. So right away, well, you're a fireman now. You're the engineer of the boat.

DM: Okay.

JW: That's how I got in there. They got on the boats, I got out of the flag in, oh, early part of October.

DM: Uh-huh. Of what year?

JW: Forty-one.

DM: Forty-one.

JW: And I was in the boats and I was in the ship's company on the *Whitney* there. See, before that I was not ship's company.

DM: Okay.

JW: I was attached to the flag.

DM: Right.

JW: So then I was working these launches. And we were hauling back and forth, you know, supplies, what have you. And whatever these destroyers needed, we'd haul.

DM: Right.

JW: Because they didn't have any boats to haul that with.

DM: Now, you went aboard the *Whitney*. Describe what the size of the *Whitney* was.

JW: Offhand, I can remember the length. It was a good-size ship. It was about 12,000 ton.

DM: How many crew?

JW: All told, I think we had around 900 men aboard.

DM: Okay.

JW: And out of that, most of 'em were—we had machinist's. We had a founder's shop, we had a carpenter shop. We had machine shop and molding shop. You name it.

DM: So you could repair destroyers.

JW: We could repair anything.

DM: Anything. So what was the mission of the *Whitney*, in summary?

JW: To supply and repair the destroyers.

DM: Okay.

JW: See, when a destroyer come in from their run, on their regular runs.

DM: Uh-huh.

JW: They needed repair. Then the navy yard is not big enough to handle all these ships at one time. So the different destroyer tenders were there. There were three at Pearl.

DM: Uh-huh.

JW: And then these different ones we assigned it to the *Whitney*, or the *Dobbin* [AD-3], or to the *Rigel* [AD-13].

DM: Or the *Whitney*.

JW: Or the *Dixie* and all that, see.

DM: Yeah.

JW: And then we would service. And then their ammunition, we'd service the ammunition. We would service them with fuel and water, you name it. We did everything. You see, on the *Whitney*, we had a torpedo gang. All they did was repair torpedoes.

DM: Okay.

JW: And we had I don't know how many hundred torpedoes stored.

DM: Right.

JW: And then depth charges, we had stored. And other ammunition. We were loaded. If they had hit us, there'd be a hole out there.

DM: Well, not only were you did repair and supply, but you were also an ammunition ship of a sorts.

JW: Yeah.

DM: Now, it's interesting, when you look at pictures of the *Whitney* and of the *Dobbin*, especially during the Pearl Harbor attack, there's all these destroyers tied to you. Was that a normal way of...

JW: Yeah. We service it that way.

DM: Oh, okay.

JW: We tied alongside, see.

DM: Well, it kind of reminds me of a mother duck and her little ducklings.

JW: Yeah, that's what it was. That's what we did. And then they got supplies from us, like, well, you name it. Food and supplies that they needed for operating.

DM: So during the attack, had the *Whitney* been hit, and all those ships tied to it, it could have been pretty much a mess?

JW: Oh yeah. Yeah. But they didn't want the *Whitney*. They wanted the aircraft carriers.

DM: Right.

JW: That was the idea. And then after the aircraft carriers, they were going after the battlewagons. And history tells you the battlewagons were obsolete, really.

DM: Yeah.

JW: And that's what they got. They got just what they wanted.

DM: Right.

JW: But they made a mistake. They should've hit us again.  
(Chuckles)

DM: Well, they wanted to, but that's a whole part of the story.

JW: Yeah.

DM: Now, what was life like for a sailor in Hawaii?

JW: Well, it was a good life. I mean you had your buddies and then well, first of all, we only had twenty-one dollars a month.

DM: Right.

JW: And as far as money-wise, you couldn't go anyplace 'cause you didn't have any money. So we usually stuck pretty close to the ship.

DM: Yeah.

JW: And of course the ship, they had different things. They had ball teams and all that stuff.

DM: Right.

JW: And then we'd participate in that stuff.

DM: But when you did go into Honolulu, was there a favorite bar or hangout you guys liked to go to?

JW: Well, I was too young.

DM: Well that didn't stop a lot of sailors.

JW: I know, but I got thrown out of a place!

DM: So you did attempt to get in a few places?

JW: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

DM: And I imagine you were rather youthful looking seventeen-year old.

JW: Oh yeah. I was quite young.

DM: Yeah. But did you eventually, able to go to Honolulu and maybe step up to the counter and have a drink if you wanted?

JW: No. Not in Honolulu. See, the *Whitney* pulled out of Honolulu in March...

DM: Uh-huh.

JW: ...of '42.

DM: Okay.

JW: And then we went down to the South Pacific.

DM: Okay.

JW: To serve those destroyers down there.

DM: Right.

JW: And Honolulu, I never. We come back once. And then after we were down, we went to Tonga first, and then we went to Noumea, that's [*New*] Caledonia. Then I got off the ship there and I got a troop transport, attack transport. And then I worked with the attack transports, went out to all...

DM: All the Pacific campaigns?

JW: Yeah.

DM: Yeah. Let's turn our attention back to the fateful weekend of December 7, 1941. On Saturday night, did you have the duty or were you on liberty?

JW: No, I had the duty. I had the duty that weekend.

DM: Uh-huh.

JW: And well actually, Saturday night we took the late run to pick up guys from shore leave.

DM: Right.

JW: And then we were off until early in the morning.

DM: Now, where would you pick them up from? Aiea Landing?

JW: From the landing by the navy yard.

DM: [*Merry*] Point.

JW: Oh, I don't remember the name of it.

DM: Yeah. But you would go into the southeast loch and pick up sailors there?

JW: Yeah, mm-hmm.

DM: Okay.

JW: Up there by the sub base.

DM: Okay. And then there was another landing in Aiea.

JW: Aiea, that was a different landing. That was mostly recreational, that landing.

DM: Is that right? Going up to Richardson Field and places like that?

JW: Yeah. 'Cause we used to go there too and like during the daytime, they had recreation up there. They had ball diamonds and tennis courts...

DM: Right.

JW: ...and swimming pools and \_\_\_\_\_. Almost where the stadium is now.

DM: Right, yeah. Well, the ball fields are still there.

JW: They're still there?

DM: Yeah. And so's the swimming pool.

JW: Oh, I played ball there. I swam there.

DM: Is that right?

JW: Yeah.

DM: It must have been just majestic seeing, 'cause you took your boat down and picked up sailors, and there's Battleship Row there.

JW: Well, I'll tell you what happened. We went into the beach, we had the early morning run.

DM: Uh-huh.

JW: That was before breakfast.

DM: Right.

JW: And by the time we come back, we had a chance to eat late breakfast, see. So we come back, we had fresh milk and

stuff. Got loaded with that and it was almost time for colors, going at eight o'clock.

DM: Right.

JW: And we wanted to tidy up. The OD says, "Wait a while," he says, "maybe we're going to have another run."

He didn't realize we didn't have breakfast. So we had to wait, wait. And then just before the colors were, then I noticed, looking south at the air base, there were planes battering down.

DM: Uh-huh.

JW: Well, there was nothing unusual, because they were practicing every day, just about. So I noticed bombs were falling. I could see that from where I was. Something wrong here. And then about that time, they come out of their dive and it's straight down. They were strafing us. And then you could see the tracers. Uh-oh, that's it.

DM: You could see 'em hitting the water?

JW: Yeah. So then the OD says, "You guys go into the beach and pick up anybody and take 'em out to their ships, wherever they belong."

So we went in there, along Battleship Row.

DM: You mean during the raid, you took that boat back into...

JW: Yeah! It was my job. So we were back in there and on the way in, the battleships were hit already and then we went in to pick up survivors, fellows in the water.

DM: Wasn't that a little frightening.

JW: Yeah, but you have no time to be scared. You're scared but through your training, you react automatically, you know.

DM: Now did—you were right going up the alley where they were dropping the torpedoes.

JW: Yeah, yeah, sure.

DM: Did you see that?

JW: Oh sure.

DM: Didn't that seem a little unreal to you?

JW: Oh boy. It was scary, I tell you. See, you're coming three abreast.

DM: Uh-huh.

JW: And then they're pretty low. And then you swear you can reach up and touch 'em.

DM: Could you see the pilots in there?

JW: Oh yeah, you can see the pilots. And you can see the tail gunner.

DM: Did they ever fire at you guys?

JW: No, they were busy getting their torpedoes.

DM: Uh-huh.

JW: And you could see the torpedoes land and then they take off.

DM: Did you see what they did?

JW: Yeah. We turned around and see—some torpedoes didn't go off, but you could see these three torpedoes coming in there when they hit.

DM: Do you know what ship they hit?

JW: They hit the *Oklahoma*. She got hit with I think six. I'm not sure how many.

DM: Right.

JW: And she capsized right away. It took about eight minutes and she was down.

DM: That must have been incredible.

JW: Yeah.

DM: So you made your way to [*Merry*] Point Landing. Were there sailors there waiting?

JW: Oh yeah. Mm-hmm. Then we went out to the ships and took care of fellows where we could. And well soon we had a load of wounded guys already.

DM: How big was this boat that you were taking?

JW: It was a forty-foot launch.

DM: Fairly big.

JW: Well, to us guys, it was a small one.

DM: Right.

JW: They had fifty-footers too.

DM: Yeah. Now, did it have canvas over the top of it?

JW: Mine didn't.

DM: It was all open.

JW: Yeah. It was all open. Some had canvases over it and then, as the protected fellows go in, got shore leave.

DM: Did you ever see a conning tower of a midget sub or anything when you were going in? Did you see anything unusual? I guess your eyes were kind of looking everywhere, right, as you were going up?

JW: Well, I'll tell you, according to what history shows, the submarines were in the harbor all night.

DM: Right.

JW: And they were—imagine, I was cruising around the harbor that night with them subs there. I never knew it. So...

DM: Well, that was the whole idea, for you not to know it!

JW: Yeah. And they knew just where we were and everything. And then, so that's what it was.

DM: So then when you picked up the sailors at [*Merry*] Point Landing and headed back out, were all of these sailors...

JW: We took 'em back down there, the wounded ones, to go to the hospital.

DM: Now, wait a second. Where did you get the wounded ones?

JW: From the battleships.

DM: So you guys went to [*Merry*] Point Landing...

JW: Mm-hmm.

DM: ...picked up sailors and took them to their ships.

JW: It was the ship they had to go to.

DM: And then also you took wounded on to return them...

JW: Yup.

DM: What was—that must have been horrible.

JW: One load of those guys, one load of wounded guys. And then see, your boat was about, oh, maybe two or three and a half feet off from the water. That's how high your gunnels were. And to reach down and pick these fellows up, it was terrible. There was one fellow we picked up, I think he was down around the *Maryland*, in there someplace.

DM: Uh-huh.

JW: And he was burnt bad. And then all full of oil and stuff. And I was going to reach up and get his arm and pick 'em up, and it slid off. I thought that was just the oil and I had skin in my hand. That was all skin came off.

DM: Had you ever seen anybody that badly injured or dead before in your life?

JW: No.

DM: How long were you there doing this rescue and...

JW: Well, through all day. Then all night. Only nighttime, we tried to work in the harbor.

DM: Yeah.

JW: And then the Marines were shooting at everything that moved, so then they secured us. And we had to stay on the beach and they had like a Quonset hut there on [*Merry*] Point.

DM: Right.

JW: And we were in there, guys were shooting the breeze. You know how things go.

DM: Right.

JW: And then there was talk about the Japs landing on Waikiki Beach.

DM: Right.

JW: That was the most likely spot for them to land. And we were—we wanted to get back to the ship. We wanted to get out of there because—then in comes an officer. And well, we were full of oil and blood and what have you. Then he wanted to know how many guys were wounded. “No, nobody’s wounded. Nobody’s wounded.”

So then a fellow who was sitting next to me, he was off the *California*. And he says, “Lookit here.”

And we had shorts on! He says, “I ain’t going to say nothing.”

And he was open, about eight, ten inches. Didn’t want to go to the hospital. So then the officer says, “Everybody strip.”

So we had to strip down to nothing, then he checked us over, "You, you, you."

About fifty percent of us guys, we had to go to the hospital. So we went down there and then...

DM: Wait a second. You went down there? Were you wounded?

JW: Yeah.

DM: What happened to you?

JW: The shrapnel from the back and the side. So then we goes down there and we could walk and everything, you know. And it didn't hurt, not at that time. So we went down to the hospital, they looked us over. And they were busy with these guys who were really hurt, see.

DM: Right.

JW: So this one nurse, oh she \_\_\_\_\_so bad. She took a tweezers, brought out that shrapnel about this long. Took about four or five pieces of shrapnel out and then they put Band-Aids on, "Okay, you go back to your unit."

So then we went back and it was fine. Then we worked in the harbor until Thursday, Thursday afternoon. Things were enough that we could get back to our ship, get clean clothes and stuff. Boy, I tell you, we smelled like a bunch of goats! (Chuckles)

So we got back to our ship and then the O.D. says, "Where were you guys? We got you listed as missing."

So we \_\_\_\_\_go aboard, had to write home right away. And they sent us, like this V-mail?

DM: Uh-huh.

JW: And then they sent home.

DM: Where'd you send it to, your folks?

JW: My folks, yeah. And then...

DM: They must have been scared to death.

JW: Well, they got the letter, their letter from the government before they got mine.

DM: Uh-huh.

JW: See, these things must have crossed. And then one day, just a little after Christmas, they got a letter that I was missing. And a few days later they got my letter so it made them feel better.

DM: Boy.

JW: It was quite an experience.

DM: The destruction of Pearl Harbor, you were eyewitness to all of the battleship line going down.

JW: Yeah. We thought—well, actually, they broke our back, is what they did. And then our fleet is really out there, they're looking for them up to a point and hiding from them for a point too.

DM: Right.

JW: And then when Halsey went out on the first run, I think he went to the Gilbert Islands. I'm not too sure where he went.

And then he came back and he had his broomsticks on top of the mast.

DM: Was it hard for you to look at Battleship Row after the attack?

JW: Yeah. It was hard. See, it burned for over three days.

DM: Right. And the *Arizona* burned the longest.

JW: That's the one that burned so long.

DM: Could you believe what had happened to her?

JW: Uh-uh [*no*]. We first thought she was hit by torpedoes. But no torpedoes touched her.

DM: Right.

JW: The bombs got her.

DM: Where were you when she exploded?

JW: Between her and the boat landing where they go out to the memorial.

DM: What was that blast like?

JW: (Phew) The concussion, your clothes were all tight on your body. It just—you've been on the water, underwater?

DM: Yeah.

JW: How your clothes stick to your body?

DM: Right.

JW: That's the way it was.

DM: It was a large concussion then?

JW: That was, besides all the others that were going off.

DM: Did you see it?

JW: Yeah. Mm-hmm. In fact, we even had a wake. It must have thrown a wake about two feet up.

DM: Rock the boat?

JW: Yeah, it rocked the boat.

DM: You must have thought how could anybody live through that?

JW: Boy, you see everything fly.

DM: What do you mean, see everything fly?

JW: Like men were flying in the air and different equipment and stuff.

DM: You're kidding.

JW: Yeah. You see that. And then the forward mast, right away, went down. You see the angle of it.

DM: Right.

JW: Well, see she got hit just in front of that.

DM: Mm-hmm.

JW: And then...

DM: And you saw the mast start collapsing down.

JW: Yeah.

DM: How old were you that day?

JW: Eighteen that day. I was seventeen when I went in and in June I was in eighteen. I was just eighteen years old. About eighteen and a half. So I always say to myself, that's instant adulthood.

DM: So you went from a kid to an adult in one day.

JW: Yup.

(Conversation off-mike)

DM: Oh, that's good. The events of December 7 are very difficult for many survivors to remember and recall.

JW: Yeah.

(Conversation off-mike)

DM: This is new technology. They invented it.

JW: Some of it.

DM: Yeah, they—well, you know the way the world works is everybody has a part and we're in a world economy...

(Conversation off-mike)

DM: Okay. During that most difficult time of the Pearl Harbor attack and this tough job you had to do of trying to rescue

people and pull people out of the water and taking them back to aid stations and stuff.

JW: Yeah.

DM: You did that all day, didn't you?

JW: Yeah, just about.

DM: And...

JW: 'Til late in the afternoon and then the...

DM: Did you realize you were wounded?

JW: No.

DM: So some of these bombs hitting the water threw shrapnel...

JW: Yeah.

DM: ...and that's what apparently hit you?

JW: Yeah. I don't know if it was that shrapnel, or the shrapnel from our guns.

DM: Because that was landing in the water too.

JW: Yeah, well what goes up has gotta come down.

DM: Right.

JW: And see like downtown Honolulu, they've always thought that there were a bunch of bombs falling in Honolulu.

DM: Yeah, by the Japanese.

JW: But they were not.

DM: They were friendly fire.

JW: Yeah, they were our bombs, our shells. See, when they fired for the aircraft...

DM: Uh-huh.

JW: ...the first ones they fired, they didn't set the fuse.

DM: Right.

JW: And then they went over the city, they hit, they went off, see. And that's what it was and it killed quite a few people.

DM: Yeah, forty-eight civilians died and almost all of them from friendly fire.

JW: Yeah, that's right.

DM: When you...

JW: Well, anyway, after we picked up as much as we could, then these other boats were helping out, see. Every boat in the harbor was helping. And then the *Oklahoma* was laying on its side.

DM: Right.

JW: And then as some fellows went past it, they heard some tapping.

DM: Right.

JW: I got this story from the other boats.

DM: Right.

JW: And then we were at the landing in the afternoon when the guys says, "Hey, there's some fellows on the *Oklahoma*!"

So we went out there, we were nosy, you know.

DM: Right.

JW: And then, sure enough, there was tapping. And then they answered, okay. So then they brought the people in from the yard.

DM: Right.

JW: And they started working on 'em. And then that was on Sunday, and then Tuesday, we went over there. We wanted to see how they were doing. We got over there and they just pulled the last ones out.

DM: I met the last guy off the *Oklahoma*.

JW: And this one fellow I met a couple of years back, we had a ship reunion over east. And then that was in Pennsylvania. And then we took a tour through like a blast furnace, making iron and stuff. And this woman that was running the tour, she says she has to go to the VA for—she has to \_\_\_\_\_ for a tap see. And the speaker was this fellow, the last guy they took off.

DM: Walter Staff? [*Note: Walter F. Staff CM2/c was a USS Oklahoma survivor.*]

JW: Yeah. And then he gave the talk. And I never met the man before, you know, since then. And then, of course, he didn't remember me, but I remembered him through his name, see.

DM: Right.

JW: And then that was a good feeling.

DM: I met Walter in 1991 at the fiftieth anniversary.

This story of Pearl Harbor that you told us, did you ever tell your wife about this and family? Did you keep it...

JW: Not too much. The latter years I could, but before that, I tried to forget it.

DM: It's just too difficult to remember, huh?

JW: Yeah. Because you know, I had friends in there and seeing this Battleship Row, going through boots, we all wanted battleships. (Chuckles)

DM: Right.

JW: And then out of our company, there were about 115 fellows. And there must have been about ten or fifteen went to school and all the rest were stationed in ships or stationed in something. And quite a few were assigned to battleships.

DM: Right.

JW: Now, a lot of these guys in our company were killed in Battleship Row and we went through boots and everything with the fellows and it makes me feel bad.

(Conversation off-mike)

DM: Okay. We're going to change tape.

END OF TAPE #42

TAPE #43

DM: I'm going to pick it up where we left it off.

JW: I forget where we left off.

DM: Yeah. It's a difficult thing, isn't it, recalling these events.

JW: Yeah. Well, see, that was such a surprise to everybody.  
Even we were surprised.

DM: Right.

JW: Because the day before, we were hauling supplies. We were sitting by sub base there. And we were talking. "Boy," one of the guys said, "look at the battleships. Isn't that a nice target?"

DM: Just joking.

JW: Yeah, just joking. Which it was, a beautiful target.

DM: Very majestic, weren't they?

JW: Beautiful ships.

DM: And you said out of your class that a number of men were on those ships.

JW: Yeah, they were on those ships.

DM: And many of them lost their lives that day.

JW: Yeah.

DM: Right where you were.

JW: Mm-hmm. So, we'd go ashore and then we met up those guys up ashore see.

DM: Yeah.

JW: We'd get together on the beach and stuff. And these guys on the battleships, "Oh, we gotta go out," so and so.

DM: Yeah.

JW: And then out on maneuvers and didn't come back. And they just came in, the battleships—the bad part of the whole thing is they were all fresh ammunition and fully fueled. They were supposed to take off the next morning, to go out to sea.

DM: Yeah, many of them.

JW: That's why she burned so long.

DM: Yeah.

JW: There was oil, I bet you, about three inches deep in the harbor.

DM: Right.

JW: And you go through it with the boats, you know, the wake and stuff. Oh, we were full of oil. The boats were full of oil. And then on top of my motor, there's a cover. And there was all kinds of holes in there.

DM: Bullet holes?

JW: Well, from shrapnel.

DM: Shrapnel.

JW: Yeah. We were strafed about three, four times but he missed us. You could see it go down along side.

DM: See the stitching?

JW: Yeah.

DM: In the water? That had to be terrifying.

JW: It is. So we saw the stitching. Well, it was off to the side, so we kept a straight course, he missed us.

DM: I know it was a very hard day, but some people remember sometimes humorous things that happened.

JW: Oh yeah, there was a lot of funny things happened.

DM: Can you relate a story like that?

JW: Well, during Pearl, not so much. But some of the other boats, they had a lot of funny things happen. But our boat, we were pretty lucky. But later on, when I got through on the transport, there were a lot of funny things happened during battle.

DM: Yeah.

JW: So...

DM: This organization you belong to, has that helped you cope with those bad memories?

JW: I think so. It helped.

DM: Do you talk to the other guys about your experience and December...

JW: Oh yeah, back and forth. But we mostly talk about the good stuff.

DM: The good stuff?

JW: Yeah, yeah.

DM: What's some of the good stuff?

JW: Well, the times we had and what ships were preferred to other ships and...

DM: Right.

JW: ...the camaraderie and the feuds. You know there's always feuds.

DM: Right. Competitions between ships.

JW: Oh yeah, oh yeah. So we had a good time.

DM: How long ago did you join the Pearl Harbor Survivors?

JW: I joined in 1968, right after...

DM: And what chapter? Did you belong to the Wisconsin chapter?

JW: Yeah, Wisconsin chapter in Milwaukee.

DM: Yeah.

JW: And then in '71 was my first time back to Pearl.

DM: What was that like?

JW: It was amazing. I was disappointed.

DM: Why were you disappointed?

JW: Oh, it changed! All the hotels. See, in Waikiki Beach, there was only two hotels when I was there and they had a theater, the Waikiki Theater.

DM: Right.

JW: That was this little place. We used to go out there for movies. It was the only decent theater where you don't smoke. All the other theaters, you smoked.

DM: Right.

JW: And you couldn't see the screen for the smoke! So we used to go out there.

DM: Uh-huh.

JW: And then we were out swimming and then when I got out there, holy man. All that hotels and what have you.

DM: What about Pearl Harbor? Did that change much?

JW: The harbor itself, no.

DM: Yeah.

JW: That stayed about the same.

DM: Was it eerie going back there?

JW: Yeah, but we—to see the *Arizona* with the memorial over it, that was eerie though. Going down there, that was hard to take.

DM: Why was that so tough for you?

JW: When you realize you have buddies down there. So...

DM: And seeing that wall with all their names?

JW: Yeah.

DM: And recognizing a few.

JW: Yeah.

DM: Is that hard?

JW: On the *Arizona*, there are two fellows I know.

DM: Do you remember their names?

JW: Wilson and—starts with an “M.” I can’t remember.

DM: Who were these guys? Guys when you went through boot camp?

JW: In boot camp, yeah. So that’s the way it goes. But the other part of the war, there was not near as bad because you expected things come up.

DM: Right. But Pearl Harbor was...

JW: It was terrible. That was the worst one. I went through the six landings and that was not as bad as Pearl.

DM: But you were right in the thick of it.

JW: Yeah. I seen everything. We had a ringside seat. And then one of the fellows in our chapter, he was on the naval base there.

DM: Uh-huh.

JW: You know the tower?

DM: Right.

JW: He was on watch in that tower when the attack started.

DM: The signal tower?

JW: Yeah.

DM: Now, that is a ringside seat.

JW: Yeah, but he says...

DM: What was his name? Do you remember?

JW: Oh. What the heck is it now? He's from Milwaukee. He's in our chapter. And he always mentions, "Yeah, I was in that tower!"

Then a couple of years back, we went back for a reunion, and then they went out to Ford Island.

DM: Uh-huh.

JW: And then he talked to the fellows on watch, see. They still hold watch up there at that time.

DM: Yeah.

JW: Then he went up there. He told us, "These are just kids there." I mean, he was a kid also at that time.

DM: Yeah.

JW: He said, you know what he said, during the attack, he says, "I was stationed right here."

The kid was amazed.

DM: Yeah. Well, there's—I'll have to send some pictures to you 'cause there's pictures of boats...

JW: Mm-hmm.

DM: ...your size right in the beginning of the attack, going up Southeast Loch, and I'm wondering if that was you.

JW: Could have been.

DM: We'll see.

JW: Can you blow up those pictures?

DM: Sure.

JW: Look for an AD-4.

DM: Oh, I don't know if you can do it that...

JW: That's what...

DM: But I'll look for it.

JW: Uh-huh.

DM: Because that AD-4 would stand for the...?

JW: The *Whitney*.

DM: The *Whitney*.

JW: It would be on the bow.

DM: Okay. Why AD?

JW: Auxiliary destroyer. [*Note: the designation AD stands for Destroyer Tender*]

DM: Okay. So it didn't have—like some of the battleships had, you know...

JW: BB.

DM: ...and all of that.

JW: And cruisers got a CL.

DM: Right. So when it came to that, they didn't personalize the boat, they just put the hull number on the whaleboat.

JW: Mm-hmm. AD-4. We were AD-4. *Dobbin* was AD-3. And this, the *Rigel*, I think was AD-1 or AD-2, one of those. And the *Dixie* was AD-13. I remember that. [*Note: USS Rigel was (AD-13) and USS Dixie was (AD-14)*]

DM: Yeah.

JW: See, working in the harbor, you get to all these different ships.

DM: Right.

JW: And I think I was aboard—I knew I was aboard every battleship before the war.

DM: Right.

JW: And kind of got to be aboard all of them. And all the other—like these cruisers and things, boy, I wanted a cruiser in the worst way afterwards.

DM: Yeah.

JW: But it didn't work that way.

DM: Never got.

JW: Usually when you get assigned to like a destroyer, once a destroyer man usually always a destroyer man.

DM: Right.

JW: And then like tenders would say, once a tender, always a tender. But I got off by luck. I got a troop transport.

DM: Yeah.

JW: And that's what it is, a battle man is usually a battle man.

DM: You know, after all these years, fifty-seven years, what do you think is the lesson of Pearl Harbor?

JW: Be prepared. You gotta stand on your own toes and you have to keep a strong service, army and navy and air force. That's all. Most of the public don't see it that way.

DM: Right.

JW: But if you've ever gone through it, then you realize that because if—we were almost defeated. If it wouldn't have been for [*President Franklin Delano*] Roosevelt, for building the fleet and the army up. See, he started building up about the time Hitler was going into Poland.

DM: Right.

JW: And we had to get into the war, financially, in order to save face, so there's no way he could declare war, so they had the Japs declare it for us.

DM: Yeah, they had an agenda themselves, didn't they?

JW: Yeah. Mm-hmm. See, [*Admiral*] Yamamoto knew his history.

DM: Right.

JW: He went to war college in the United States.

DM: Right.

JW: And there was an exercise in Pearl Harbor in the thirties.

DM: Right.

JW: I think [*General*] "Billy" Mitchell was one of the officers that helped the exercise, planned it. I'm not sure about that. But anyway, it was planned for attack on Pearl on a Sunday morning.

DM: Right.

JW: And they went through maneuvers fine. They came out perfect. And Yamamoto copied it. He used the same tactics as what they had. That's what he did. And our technical

end, the code was broke, but you know regulations. You've got to go this and that, you know of course. And then radar was something new. It was a toy. And these fellows on the radar, they spotted the planes and they reported it and then they knew there were some B-17's coming in. "Oh, those are B-17's. Don't worry about it," see.

DM: Yeah, peacetime Hawaii.

JW: And then B-17's were flying around, trying to land.

DM: Right.

JW: We were shooting at 'em.

DM: I interviewed one of the navigators that flew over Pearl Harbor.

JW: Oh.

DM: They said they were getting the hell shot out of...

JW: Yeah.

DM: You saw that?

JW: Yeah.

DM: Yeah.

JW: Well, they were coming over low, yeah, and they were peppering 'em like crazy. And I'll bet you those guys, you know, how they felt.

DM: He had a good story to tell.

JW: Yeah, I imagine so.

DM: After—is there anything that you’d like to mention that we didn’t talk about?

JW: As far as the youth go, you know, we have a lot of problems, a lot of years ago they did too, but today you have your transportation and things, I think every kid fresh out of high school should put at least two years in the service.

DM: Why do you think that?

JW: To get discipline! But of course, in the service today it’s different than it was years ago. Years ago, you never talked back to a sergeant or a chief petty officer. And if you did, you got one on the side of the head, you know, or a boot. And today they can’t even do that. I know when I first went in, boy, I tell you...

DM: Wouldn’t talk back would you?

JW: Oh no. Today, if you don’t want to do something, you just tell ‘em, “I don’t want to do it,” and that don’t work. So you have to get disciplined. But today is a little different, the way the laws are today, it doesn’t work anymore.

DM: Well, fifty-seven years ago you had a very, very difficult day.

JW: Yeah.

DM: And memories of that day will be with you forever, but I want to thank you for sharing those with us.

JW: I thank you for having me.

DM: And we know that you know Pearl Harbor means a lot to you guys...

JW: Yeah.

DM: ...and this story that you told us will be part of several stories that will document that.

JW: That's right.

DM: That attack. Thank you very much.

JW: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW